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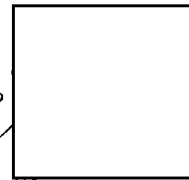
GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/RR GM 62-8
October 1962

SURFACE ACCESS TO WEST BERLIN



DOCUMENT NO. 1
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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The large number of vehicles passing through the highway checkpoints each day suggests the simplest method of harassment of highway traffic. By slowing down the processing of documents, the East Germans can increase the length of the line waiting for document processing and drastically reduce the amount of highway traffic. The barriers and salom-type obstacles also contribute to slow movement. The congestion caused by the back-up of civilian traffic can be utilized to advantage by the Soviet-East German authorities to blur the distinction between civilian and military traffic. Such congestion also provides an ostensible basis for demanding advance notification of the arrival of military transport.*

Under normal conditions the Babelsberg checkpoint handles more traffic than all other border crossing points together and is therefore the greatest potential bottleneck. In 1960, 61.8 percent of the trucks enroute to Berlin entered via Helmsdorf, 14.9 percent via Topen, and 3 percent via Herleshausen, thus making a total of nearly 80 percent that passed through the Babelsberg checkpoint. Another 20.2 percent of the trucks entered via Lauenberg, and 0.1 percent via Mübeck-Schlutup.

Surface traffic is also vulnerable to Communist claims that the bridges and the autobahn had been damaged by the increased Allied traffic and had to be closed for repairs. The "need for repairs" was the ostensible reason for closing the autobahn bridge over the Elbe at the time of the blockade. In such cases the potentially most troublesome points along the autobahn are bridges that cannot easily be bypassed, the most critical of which is still the Elbe River bridge (see maps). Most of the other critical bridges are between Magdeburg and Berlin. Still other bridges and overpasses would, if destroyed, slow down traffic and cause inconvenience; but they could, nevertheless, be bypassed fairly easily.

Hard-surfaced, all-weather secondary roads are numerous and in many cases would provide alternatives with relatively short detours if bridges or sections of the autobahn were closed. Closure of the Elbe River bridge, on the other hand, would entail a considerable detour via Magdeburg (see small map, Magdeburg area). The use of such a detour might raise Soviet and East German objections because the traffic would have to pass through the city, but there are no practical alternatives. The nearest other bridges are at Schönebeck about 11 kilometers to the south and Tangermünde 40 kilometers to the north; ferries, although numerous, could not handle the necessary volume of traffic.

Military training grounds occupy considerable land on both sides of the autobahn. Passage through these restricted areas is prohibited to all but specifically authorized persons. Therefore, closure of a portion of the autobahn bounded by military training areas would raise the question as to whether to detour around the military areas or take a shorter route through them.

Between Berlin and the Elbe, there are fairly extensive areas where cross-country detours would be impractical most of the time because of soil type, moisture conditions, or degree of slope. In still other places the forests, which cover about 25 percent of the area, restrict cross-country movement in areas where it otherwise would be practical (see map). Closure of the autobahn for repairs in such places would make long detours necessary; and, if accompanied by closure of some secondary routes, the situation could become critical and would raise the issue of using other routes, including other autobahn routes, for which there is no specific agreement.

If road traffic alone were harassed, it is possible that the railroads might be able to handle much of the halted traffic. Although the basic rail access agreements provide for a daily maximum of 13 freight trains to Berlin from the Federal Republic, not all of these trains have been used in the past. Furthermore the controlling agreements place no limits on the length or capacity of the trains. Obviously, however, the conditions of the roadbed and equipment impose technical limitations upon the capacity of the railroads. At one time, the technical limit on the size of the trains was stated to be 60 cars (120 axles) or a gross tonnage of 1,200 tons, including the weight of the freight cars.

The statistics for September 1961, a busy month, illustrate the extent of unused railroad capacity. A total of 115 trains comprising 11,528 cars carried 196,132 tons, an average of 16.7 tons per car. If all 13 trains daily had been used and all had carried 60 cars with this same average load, 390,780 tons could have been transported. Thus an additional tonnage roughly equivalent to half the present tonnage could be transported by rail if all 13 train paths were fully utilized. In 1961, an additional 1,132,000 tons of freight probably could have been moved by rail. This estimate, however, assumes that the trains would be expeditiously handled by the Reichsbahn, which is far from certain.

Conversely, the theoretical capacity of highways to absorb rail traffic, if it were harassed, is much more limited. The major factor in determining the amount of goods that could be hauled by road is the rate of processing at the checkpoints. If the number of trucks needed could be obtained, which in itself would raise another set of problems, all of the trucks would still have to be processed through the checkpoints. In 1959 and 1960 an average of about 507 trucks per day were cleared. Although it is true that about 1,400 cars and 75 buses also were processed daily, it is unlikely that the Soviet or East German authorities would continue to cooperate to that extent with road traffic while harassing rail traffic. It has been estimated that the fastest processing that probably could be expected is 2 minutes per truck, or a daily rate of 720 trucks. At an average capacity of 10 tons** each, this would amount to 2,628,000 tons annually, which is less than has been carried by road in recent years.

Inland waterway traffic is especially vulnerable to Soviet maneuvering, although the importance of the port of Hamburg and the Elbe waterway to Czechoslovakian and East German trade tends to counterbalance this vulnerability. Traffic can be halted easily by closing a lock or portion of the waterway for repairs. Routing alternatives are limited. Nature, itself, sometimes limits operations -- by low water in summer and ice in winter. Most of the barges and tugs involved in the Federal Republic-West Berlin traffic are of West German registry and are privately owned. In the event that all but military traffic were stopped, it probably would be extremely difficult to establish military contractual arrangements to cover all water transport. Such arrangements would also have to cover the operators because no US, UK, or French military personnel are qualified to operate barges on these waterways.

The conditions of surface access to West Berlin are complex and offer many opportunities for the Soviet Union to erode Allied morale and increase the difficulties of the Western Allies in fulfilling their obligations to administer and provision West Berlin. The signing of a peace treaty between East Germany and the USSR would further complicate the procedural aspects of surface access to Berlin and provide new opportunities for harassment. Although East Germany ostensibly would be in charge, the USSR would have the ultimate responsibility and, no doubt, would lay down the ground rules for East German actions.

* On one occasion, civilian traffic waiting to be processed at a checkpoint occupied the right lane, in which military traffic normally parks, and military convoys then parked on the center strip. The Soviet authorities said they would have cleared parking space in the right lane for the military traffic if they had had advance notification. They also indicated that they would refuse to process other military vehicles that were not parked in the right lane.

** Although truck loads in recent years have averaged about 16 tons, it is doubtful that this average could be attained under the circumstances envisaged because about 40 percent of the civilian trucks used are registered in the Federal Republic and probably could not be utilized.

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